

# **Santa Clara County Embarks on the Year of Opportunity**

Delivered by Dave Cortese, Santa Clara County Board President at the 2015 State of the County Address

I want to start tonight by thanking my colleagues on the Board of Supervisors for choosing me to lead the board this year. It is truly an honor. With us tonight are Supervisors Cindy Chavez, Ken Yeager, Joe Simitian and Mike Wasserman. I especially want to thank Mike Wasserman, our outgoing Board President. He's led us with a steady hand during the past year. Mike, your enthusiasm for our community, your compassion for our residents and your strong business sense have kept Santa Clara County moving in the right direction.

Next, I'd like to recognize our County Executive Jeff Smith. Please give him a round of applause for his continual guidance and leadership in moving the County forward.

Last but not least, I thank my own staff and my wife, Pattie, and family in advance for their support through what will be another very busy year.

The State of the County is good and getting better.

For that we owe:

- Thanks to prudent management through one of the toughest economic times on the books – a decade in which we were forced to make cuts totaling \$1.8 billion.
- Thanks to taxpayers who have continued to support our initiatives.
- And especially thanks to our 15,000 county employees who agreed to take cuts in wages and benefits during those tough years. I personally want to thank them for working cooperatively with us. It was not easy, but our county workforce stepped up and delivered, just like they do every day. I'm proud of all of us for putting the people of Santa Clara County first.

We entered 2015 with a balanced budget that included a small surplus, and we expect our 2016 budget to also hold steady. Our economy is strong and Silicon Valley is booming. As home to the largest companies that change the world on a daily basis, Santa Clara County captures the heart of Silicon Valley—the epicenter

of this daily innovation revolution. A new Valley of Hearts delight.

Our companies are expanding at an ever increasing rate. They're creating high-paying jobs and new wealth like we've never seen before. The month of August saw the South Bay create jobs at a new all-time record, and the pace continues.

As much as we should celebrate that success, however, we must also recognize that for every new stock-option millionaire we create, there are many more people who are struggling every day to make ends meet, to provide their families with the quality of life that befits a community as wealthy as ours. The challenges of a nation and a global economy are also the challenges of Santa Clara County.

So, it's for the people who work hard and struggle to make life better for themselves and their children, where much of our work as a County is focused. And for good reason. What has always made this county what it is today is the intersection of opportunity and quality of life. If we lose that, we lose our Valley of Hearts Delight.

Today, despite our successes and great wealth, the questions about how we sustain ourselves as a county that creates opportunity and quality of life for all its people are as profound as ever before in our century and a half of history.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow said, "Ability is of little account without opportunity."

That is why I am declaring 2015 the Year of Opportunity. Working together, we can seize on the opportunity to better our community. Working with new leadership in our cities, we can pursue opportunities for meaningful partnerships to address pressing issues.

Bringing people together, we can make sure that the ladder of opportunity and quality of life exists for everyone in our Valley, especially those trying to ascend from the bottom up. That's not too much to ask of the community that boasts to being among the highest in per capita productivity in the world.

To do that, Santa Clara County must ensure we take every opportunity to support businesses so they can thrive, grow and succeed. That our teachers can afford to live in the community where they teach our kids; that janitors and office secretaries have access to healthcare for themselves and their families. That

those returning from incarceration have the necessary support to stay out of prison and that the county supports prevention efforts to keep kids out of gangs and away from drugs.

Santa Clara County works best when we work together. Over the next year, my goal is to ensure Santa Clara County works for everyone. We will get there by seizing upon ideas that will bring people together and by focusing less on what divides us.

We must embrace innovative ideas, explore every potential solution to a problem and seek out new ways of thinking to continually improve the quality services the county delivers and more importantly, improve the quality of life for all our residents.

We must avoid the bad political habit of discarding ideas, abandoning solutions or rejecting new ways of thinking based on where those ideas came from or who supports them. Too often, we choose sides instead of choosing solutions.

So today, I'm challenging myself, my colleagues on the Board of Supervisors, our County CEO and our community partners to be open to ideas and solutions from any quarter that will improve the services we deliver to our community.

Our community's challenges do not know sides. Homelessness does not know a political party affiliation. Violent crime victimizes families regardless of whether they are labor advocates or business advocates, Republicans or Democrats. Clogged roads and highways don't choose which cars to tie up in traffic or whether drivers live in North County or South County or what language the driver speaks. We face these struggles together.

If solving our toughest problems like homelessness, affordable housing, public safety and access to quality health care means bringing people and organizations together who would rather not be in the same room with each other, then I am more committed than ever to making that happen. As Einstein said, "In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity."

### Homelessness

In a valley among the highest in per capita income, productivity and wealth in the world, it is unthinkable that homelessness is one of our largest challenges. Let's

rededicate ourselves to the declaration former Supervisor Don Gage made a few years ago: “It is time to end homelessness.”

It is important for us to remember that every person living on the street or in a camp is someone’s brother or sister, someone’s father or mother. Someone’s child. There are 7,600 homeless on any given night in Santa Clara County with over 5,000 in San Jose alone. Stunningly, nearly 1,000 are veterans and another 25 percent are children.

We have the opportunity to use all of our strength and expertise to tackle homelessness and the affordable housing crisis we are facing -- and do it now.

So today, I am proposing a credible and high visibility Task Force charged with assessing the County’s opportunity to contribute to the region’s emergency shelter, transitional housing and permanent housing solutions.

I know what you’re thinking. Do we need another Task Force when we have and have had a variety of committees, commissions and other working groups over the years, all working on the challenges of ending homelessness?

The answer is yes. And here’s why: This Task Force will build on the work of those other groups that helped us accomplish so much. The Board of Supervisors adopted a Guiding Principles for Housing Policy, we’re moving forward with a partnership with the Housing Authority and Housing Trust Silicon Valley. And recently we supported the Community Plan to End Homelessness.

We have a number of initiatives in the works to create transitional housing for homeless families and greatly increase our stock of affordable housing. Among them are studies on starting a Permanent Housing for the Homeless Charter Fund that would require no tax increase and the possible use of micro-housing to provide transitional homes for those awaiting permanent housing.

But we’ve yet to develop a cogent, broadly supported and publicly understood approach to the problem we’re facing right now.

- This Task Force’s term will be only 10 months, with a report due to the Board of Supervisors later this year.

- This Task Force will be sharply focused on identifying the County's most critical and feasible opportunities to address affordable housing and homelessness with solutions that need to be launched in the short term.
- Members would include Supervisors Wasserman and Chavez, and a representative of the City of San Jose chosen by the Mayor, members of the State legislative delegation, a representative of the Housing Authority and others as appropriate. The public and community housing leaders, including non-profit organizations, the private sector and the faith community, would be called on to participate. And how about including some community stakeholders who are or have been homeless themselves?
- And here is the fun part. In the spirit of our commitment to engage broad support, the Task Force will be co-chaired by our emcees for the evening -- Matt Mahood, President and CEO of the San Jose Silicon Valley Chamber of Commerce, and Ben Field, Executive Officer of the South Bay Labor Council.

### Public Safety

While we help provide quality homes for all our residents, we must work to make sure residents are safe. No matter if you live in East San Jose, Sunnyvale, Gilroy, Palo Alto or Milpitas, every family deserves a safe neighborhood.

We're fortunate in Santa Clara County to have a highly professional and talented sheriff's department, prosecutors and firefighters and excellent relationships with the public safety departments of our cities. As effective and talented as they are, we can do better. We have an opportunity to be innovative and improve our ability to combat crime, improve emergency response times and save money.

- We have already taken steps to fill our vacancies in the Sheriff's Department to bolster our ability to fight crime through widespread recruiting of candidates into our academies. At the beginning of 2014, there were 215 vacant badge positions out of 1,320. We expect to have fewer than 30 vacancies at the end of 2015. Congratulations to you, Sheriff Smith, and your department.

- We also can be proud of our work to fight human trafficking, a crime of modern day slavery. We invested \$850,000 to step up our efforts in the Sheriff's Office and the District Attorney's Office with support from the South Bay Coalition to End Human Trafficking. We've also created a Human Trafficking Commission to support law enforcement and collaborate with regional, national and international partners. Thank you to Supervisor Chavez for taking the lead on this.
- We can and should consolidate fire services. By combining elements of the various city and county fire department functions within the county, including San Jose, we can improve service and reduce response times and costs while increasing efficiency.
- We can act on Supervisor Joe Simitian's call for the Sheriff's Office to require its deputies to wear body-worn cameras. His proposal echoes the sentiment of community members and other government agencies around the country in the wake of recent episodes of alleged police misconduct. It was first proposed by Sheriff Laurie Smith who was seeking Measure A funds for the initiative. It's time to revisit the issue and bring it to closure.

In 2011, I declared the Year of the Child and made a call for eliminating youth incarceration. By working with youth service providers and the Justice System, we've made great progress in reducing the number of youth sent to Juvenile Hall and other detention facilities. At its peak several years ago, our Juvenile Hall and Ranches housed 350. Our report this month shows that number to be 158.

Yet, violence and weapons offenses involving youth offenders continue to afflict Santa Clara County and our biggest city, San Jose. So, I'm suggesting to my colleagues, the creation of an Office of Neighborhood Safety modeled after the City of Richmond's program of the same name, a non-law enforcement agency with a sole focus to reduce loss of life associated with firearm offenses. We'll call on those who maintain effective programs with youth here at the County and the City of San Jose, including the Mayor's Gang Prevention Task Force.

In addition, we will:

- Create a Community Engagement Program by deploying Neighborhood Change Agents to build healthy relationships with those most likely to be offenders or victims of gun violence. The Neighborhood Change Agents will serve as their mentors, be credible messengers of healthy information and examples of positive and healthy lifestyles.
- We will also create a Juvenile Fellowship program for juvenile offenders who engage in violent activities or use firearms. The program will provide mentorship, intervention services and small stipends. In exchange, we'll require the youth to actively participate in the program, show positive behavior and work on improving their lives through education, job training and a resolution to the pain and damage they caused their victims and the community.

### Public Health

We can create safe and healthy neighborhoods, but we also have the opportunity to support healthy families. Santa Clara County provides first- class health care services to every section of our community. Our Registered Nurses, Doctors and other health care workers are dedicated to taking care of the thousands of patients they serve each year.

Our Level 4 Trauma Center, Burn Unit and Brain Injury Unit are state of the art facilities that are staffed with specialists ready to respond to emergencies. But we can do more in the area of public health.

Diabetes is a disease that affects thousands of people in our county. If we are bold, we can reverse the growth of type 2 Diabetes in Santa Clara County ensuring that every one of our 1.8 million residents has access to screening and comprehensive efforts are made to prevent cases from ever getting beyond the pre-diabetes stage.

No metro area in the country has taken on this task at this level. But many of our efforts have become national models -- our anti-smoking ordinances, our campaign to curb childhood obesity, the Children's Health Initiative that provided insurance to 94% of children in Santa Clara County. And the first ever comprehensive studies on the health needs of our Vietnamese, Hispanic and African American residents and the LGBT community.

So, we can seize another opportunity to be innovative and responsive in the area of diabetes. Supervisor Yeager has agreed to lead this effort, which is so appropriate given his legacy of public health work in this county.

We plan this year to conduct a new assessment of the health of our children in Santa Clara County. This report will serve as a valuable tool for community partners, leaders and advocates who serve children to work closely with local government, state and federal partners to build a healthier place to live and work.

For our older residents, we increased our funding for the Senior Nutrition Program so that participants this month started enjoying meals cooked on-site at their community centers so they receive food that is fresher and more nutritious. That's just part of an ambitious Senior Agenda, which I started in 2011. This project has vastly changed the way the county and senior serving agencies interact and has vastly improved the services that seniors receive. Now, we will work toward the goal of becoming a World Health Organization "Age Friendly" Community.

We can also make sure that more residents have access to our quality health care. I don't mean health insurance. Covered California has enrolled nearly 230,000 last year, with another enrollment period under way. I mean making our quality doctors and nurses available to the Silicon Valley workforce by expanding Santa Clara County clinic hours to include evenings and weekends.

### Immigration

Santa Clara County is one of the most diverse counties in the state and nation. At least 100 languages and dialects are spoken here and more than 50 percent of County residents speak a language other than English at home. We consider this diversity an asset. It makes us who we are. But it also demands that we respond to the needs of our diverse community, including our immigrants.

The recent and numerous legislative changes in immigration are positive but can also be confusing. We need to be sure that our immigrant populations receive accurate and understandable information as well as supportive services to help them integrate and be successful in our communities.

Acting on a proposal from Supervisor Chavez and me, the Board of Supervisors has asked administrators to look into creating a County Office of Immigrant Relations. Let's make that happen.

Let's also take the opportunity to form partnerships with the City of San Jose and Community Foundations to research the impact of changes in immigration rules in our area and coordinate services so that all immigrants have equal access to County services.

For starters, we can launch an education campaign to stop fraudulent *notarios* from preying on immigrants who are trying to navigate through complicated legal situations.

This year, is the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of Saigon at the end of the Vietnam War. Thanks to the American Veterans of that war. We plan to light up the County Breezeway just indoor from the James P. McEntee Plaza with the yellow and red colors of the Vietnamese Heritage flag in April for the anniversary.

### Economic Development

It's often said that government doesn't create jobs, businesses do. As a businessman, I know there is some truth to that. I believe that Santa Clara County has an opportunity to work with each city in the County to help jumpstart economic development projects that will create quality paying jobs. How can we do that?

First, we create a County Economic Development Office that will seek out opportunities for our communities across Santa Clara County. One of our biggest assets is the amount of land the County owns or has jurisdiction over that can be put to use.

The new office will be asked to study how we can connect our goals with the way we use our land and provide incentives to builders and businesses who want to help us meet our goals. For example, we need to find ways to reward our housing developers for building affordable housing and shelter for our homeless population.

At the same time, we will continue to support our small businesses, many of them owned by members of our ethnic communities with programs like the Small Business Development Center. In 2012, my office sponsored an economic summit to help these businesses grow and prosper. We are planning another for this year.

But we can look beyond land to explore economic activity. I've often said that Alviso and our bay front can be one of the crown jewels of our county. This year is our opportunity to let the world know that the South Bay really does have a south bay.

When I joined this board just six years ago, our county's bay shoreline from Alviso to Moffett Field was salt ponds, and there was virtually no navigable access to the Bay.

Thanks to Senator Diane Feinstein and the commitment of former San Jose Mayor Ron Gonzales, our shoreline is now a publicly accessible wildlife refuge. During my first term on the board we cobbled together the money to build a new marina in Alviso—complete with a boat launch with full access to the San Francisco Bay.

Boaters and kayakers have been making use of it ever since, and in 2013, it was identified as the first site on the new Bay Water Trail. It's time we invest in making the marina a must-visit attraction and educational tool for residents, out of town visitors and school kids.

With the support of Sheriff Laurie Smith, who has jurisdiction over the waters and boats, our CEO Jeff Smith and our Parks Department, we will create a pilot public tourism program that will offer boating field trips around the Don Edwards Wildlife Refuge. And our children will learn the impact of climate change first-hand in an outdoor classroom on the water.

Perhaps it could become as popular as the South County's recently designated Wine Trail, a project launched by Supervisor Wasserman, to keep us from losing agri-tourism and wine tasting to Napa and the counties to the north. So Mike, with your leadership, I'm expecting every one of our 2016 Super Bowl guests from around the country to take that tour with a glass of south county wine in hand.

Our relationships with Sacramento and Washington are good. But we can do more to seek opportunities with our own legislative delegation. Several members have expressed interest in co-hosting legislative work sessions in our county

chambers to explore ways to be more helpful. One of those ready to roll up his sleeves with us is Sen. Jim Beall, the new chair of the Senate Transportation Committee. The county no longer has a legislative committee, so we need a new model to go about our business with Sacramento and Washington. I can think of nobody better than Supervisor Simitian, a former State Senator, to come up with efficient ways re-engage our board with our lawmakers. Joe, thank you for agreeing to help out.

### Conclusion

I know our County can continue to be successful, that we can bring all sides together with respect to improving the quality of life for all.

William Ellery Channing said, “The job of government is not to confer happiness but to give people the opportunity to be happy”.

Together, we will create the opportunity for the homeless to have shelter.

Together we will create the opportunity for every person at risk of diabetes to have the resources they need.

Together we will make good on the opportunity and the promise to our children to provide the best that we have to give.

Together, we will use every opportunity to ensure that residents in North County, South County, in all neighborhoods East and West will feel safe by simply putting their safety first.

Together, we will jumpstart new economic development opportunities and ensure our businesses continue to thrive and innovate.

Tonight, reaffirms our commitment to move towards achieving these opportunities, together. It will be a long road and, at times, a difficult path forward. But I’m ready for that challenge. I know you’re ready for that challenge. And I know our community is ready for that challenge.

Thank you and good night.